

# From sea to shore: Replenishing Long Beach Island

## 150-foot-wide beach goal by 2010

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Along some stretches of beach on Long Beach Island there isn't enough space at high tide to spread a washcloth on the sand.

But by the end of the decade, most of the island will have 150 feet of sand above the water line, grass-covered dunes and handicapped-accessible entrances from free parking lots to the ocean.

Thirty years of erosion, 10 years of studies and planning, and years of complaints about inferior beach protection will be addressed in the \$75 million replenishment and maintenance plan expected to last 50 years.

The first phase, costing federal, state, county and local governments about \$7.8 million, is scheduled to begin in late spring with sand being pumped onto beaches in Surf City and Ship Bottom.

As much as sun worshippers, wave riders and ocean swimmers will benefit from the improvements, there is no mistaking the reason for the project.

"We are here to provide shore protection to homeowners," said Benjamin Keiser, an engineer at the state Bureau of Coastal Management in Toms River. "We want to safeguard the infrastructure . . . homes, businesses and roadways."

In the six communities on Long Beach Island, property values exceed \$11 billion — about \$750 million a mile. Oceanfront homes are selling for between \$2.5 million and \$4 million, according to Linda Purcell, the Barnegat Light office manager for Long Beach Island Realty. She said lots where houses are being demolished for new homes are selling for between \$7 million and \$8 million.

But in the Holgate section of Long Beach Township, occupied by part of the Edwin B. Forsythe Wildlife Refuge, there are no plans for beach replenishment since there is no infrastructure needing protection.

Noreen Bodman, president of the Jersey Shore Partnership, a Freehold-based group that advocates for beach replenishment, responds to critics of the costly practice that it is "based on scientific fact and not reaction and passion."

### Some will lose views

Some beachfront homeowners are concerned their multimillion-dollar homes will lose views of the ocean and beach. Others will be asked or forced to sell parcels for beach access and parking every quarter-mile on the island, as mandated by the state Department of Environmental Protection.

State Sen. Leonard T. Connors Jr., R-Ocean, estimated a 20- to 25-space parking lot would cost a minimum of \$1 million. Connors also said Long Beach Township might have to pay between \$8 million and \$10 million to obtain property needed to meet the demands.

In the more affluent sections of the island, such as North Beach and Loveladies, some property owners will no longer be able to shoo away beachgoers with "private drive" and "no beach access" signs, according to the DEP mandate.

Others have expressed concern about changes to surfing and fishing patterns.

According to Keiser, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers plans to build a 22-foot-high, 30-foot-wide dune the length of the island. Keiser said a 200-foot-wide stretch of sand will separate the dune from the ocean.

The sand will be pumped from offshore, where test bores have already been analyzed.

"The grain and color will be the same as the sand on the beach right now," Keiser said.

At 22 feet, the dune will obscure ground-floor ocean views and some second-floor views.

On Thursday, Robert Irvine, a beachfront homeowner in Long Beach Township, stood a 22-foot extension ladder in the sand.

"If there was a mountain of sand there, would I be able to see the ocean from my second-floor deck?" he said. "No, I don't think so."

Irvine said he gets \$3,300 to rent the second floor of his Ocean Avenue duplex during peak summer weeks.

"I don't know if I can charge that for a home that doesn't have an ocean view," he said. "So this is something that could impact me dramatically."

### **Non-negotiable**

Keiser said the 22-foot dune is not negotiable. The height was determined based on models from the worst three storms over the past 25 years.

Purcell said a rental property in Loveladies with an unobstructed beach view goes for \$8,000 a week during the peak season.

"If that same house was in Barnegat Light where there are already 20-foot dunes, it would go for between \$4,000 and \$4,500 a week," she said. "I think people will be reluctant to pay high-ticket prices for homes without the view."

Bodman, however, noted that without replenishment, there might not be a house to rent in the event of a powerful storm.

"I understand the worries and concerns of homeowners," said Bodman, who directed tourism under former Govs. Thomas H. Kean and Christine Todd Whitman. "But you can't rent a house that has waves crashing through it, either."

"Which would you rather have?" she asked. "A beach with no view or no beach?"

Bodman said New Jersey's four coastal counties bring in \$19 billion in revenue, resulting in \$1.8 billion in state and local taxes.

"The four counties bring in \$500 million each on a \$75 million investment using rounded-off numbers," she said. "Show me another program in New Jersey that generates that kind of return on an investment."

Beachfront property owners have been asked to grant easements so replenishment can begin and maintenance continues for 50 years. Surf City needs the fewest easements, 26, while Long Beach Township needs the most, nearly 600. Figures for Ship Bottom, Beach Haven and Harvey Cedars weren't available Thursday. Any homeowner not voluntarily providing the easements faces eminent domain action.

At a Long Beach Township commissioners meeting last month, William Kunz of the Brant Beach section said he would not sign an easement if it meant he would lose his view.

"The township can come out and reassess the value of my home without the view," he said.

William Knarre, president of Brant Beach homeowners association, said he has received 50 calls with questions about the letter explaining the process.

"I really don't see beach access being a problem south of North Beach because there is access at each street end," he said. "Surf City and Harvey Cedars won't have issues and Barnegat Light is not involved in the project."

Some officials believe homeowners unwilling to grant easements could slow the project and extended delays could result in the loss of federal funding.

"I'm just afraid if we don't use it, we'll lose it," said Connors, who also is mayor of Surf City.

Rep. H. James Saxton, R-N.J., fought to keep the funding in the federal budget.

"It has taken us 10 years and a lot of work on behalf of a lot of people at all levels of government to get where we are today," a spokesman for Saxton said. "I encourage state and local officials to work together on all remaining issues, including public access, to make this project happen in an efficient and orderly manner."

Connors also expressed concern about municipalities having to foot the entire bill to provide beach access.

"I sponsored a bill that would use shore protection funds to acquire the property," he said. Everyone in New Jersey will be able to use the beaches, he said, so it's reasonable for the state to acquire the property, with the county and municipalities splitting the other costs.

John Weber of the Surfrider Foundation spent his summers in Beach Haven and said he is concerned about the replenishment project.

"Our concern is attempted development on the beaches after replenishment," he said. "We would have preferred the easement issues were cleared first instead of starting the project and crossing their fingers the issues will be resolved in Loveladies and North Beach."

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